

Making a Bigger Difference in Localities

Proposals to Develop Area Management and Area Committees in Leeds

By

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Executive Summary

This report gives the background to Area Management in Leeds and highlights the responsibilities delegated and progress made by Area Committees and area working to date.

It details the functions delegated by the Council's Executive Board to the Area Committees in 2006/07 which cover services relating to streetscene, the youth service, community safety and public conveniences.

It provides a summary of comments from Members of the Council following a questionnaire which went to all Elected Members earlier this year.

There is cross party support for the enhancement of Area Committees and it is thought that they can make a bigger difference to localities and should be given more delegated responsibilities.

The report details a number of proposals for the Council to consider relating to three broad areas:

- The roles of Elected Members and Area Committees
- Developing locality working
- Further delegated responsibilities for the Area Committees

It recommends that the findings are discussed with Area Committee Chairs and the proposals are presented to the Council's Executive Board along with an action plan to extend area working and the responsibilities of the Area Committees.

1. Introduction

In my role as lead member working with Cllr Les Carter, Executive Member for the Neighbourhoods and Housing Portfolio, I was asked to look at the Area Management Functions from an Elected Member's perspective.

From the work I have done and the consultation I have undertaken it is evident that Area Committees can and do make a big difference to Leeds. The proposals in this report will look to give them an increased role and further responsibilities to enable them to make an even bigger positive impact in the future. This will involve building on current successes with Area Management since it came into being in 2004, addressing some current weaknesses and looking to devolve more power to the Area Committees to enhance and increase their role in our communities across the City.

I have had detailed discussions with staff supporting Area Management, officers in a range of services and with all Area Committee Chairs or their deputies. I sought the views of Elected Members and arranged for a questionnaire to go out to all Elected Members to give them an opportunity to express their views. Over a third of Elected Members responded to this and I have sought to cover a truly representative set of proposals in this report.

I am optimistic that the Council's Executive Board will soon be in a position to consider the report alongside proposals from Officers and agree a way forward for enhanced area working in Leeds.

2. Background

Area management and Area Committees were set up in June 2004 following a detailed report presented to the Executive Board in October 2003.

The objectives of Area Management were to:

- A) integrate and improve the co-ordination of services at local level
- B) ensure continual improvement of council services
- C) allow locally based decision making and accountability to ensure that council services better address local issues and locally determined priorities

The aim was to expand the role and powers of local members.

Five operational areas were set up allowing for the subdivision of inner and outer Area Committees, which were based on wards with similar character to each other.

5 wedge partnerships were established with Leeds Initiative partners which related to the operational boundaries of major partners at that time.

A new officer structure was put into place to support Area Management in the following way:

- A Senior officer presence in each area to co-ordinate services and develop positive relationships with other related organisations.
- Officer Support for service planning, management, monitoring, partnership and project work
- Officer Support for the workloads of the Area Committees and area based partnerships and neighbourhood based community activity
- Provision of support for neighbourhood renewal and regeneration projects

The Role of the Area committees

Area Committees were set up to:

- Have discretion over certain services within an overall framework
- Perform a performance management role to include monitoring the standard of services provided in their area
- Be consulted on major policies and strategies that may affect their area
- Be a forum for hearing deputations on local issues and responsibilities for community consultation and involvement
- Work in partnership with District Partnerships, Regeneration and ALMO Boards

Area Committee Responsibilities

It was initially envisaged that the Committees would have responsibilities for:

- **Streetscape** - to include street cleansing, waste management, street lighting and highways maintenance.
- **Youth Services** - discretion over youth work provision and ensuring the Youth Council Model was rolled out to areas
- **Community Safety** -to include anti-social behaviour programmes, neighbourhood wardens and local CCTV schemes
- **Public Conveniences**

The first Executive Functions were delegated to the Area Committees in September 2004. The Area Function Schedules set out the executive functions delegated to each Area Committee. They set out the extent of the delegation to specific functions and the total resources available for each function on an area basis.

Below is a description of the functions delegated to the Area Committees in 2006/07.

Functions Delegated to Area Committees 2006/07

Description of Function: Leeds Community Safety-CCTV
The reduction of crime and disorder via Leedswatch by preventing and detecting crime in the areas where CCTV cameras operate. CCTV provides reassurance to communities within the target areas thereby improving the quality of life for people in those areas. Leedswatch works with West Yorkshire Police and other Council services to target crime reduction activity in high victimisation areas thus taking a co-ordinated approach to reducing anti social behaviour and crime across the target areas.
Minimum Service Expectations
-provide 24 hour365 days a year monitoring of CCTV in areas of operation. -Contribute to the fear of crime by facilitating the apprehension and prosecution of offenders and assisting in prevention and aiding detection of crime committed in public areas where CCTV in areas of operation.

Description of function: Community Centres

This covers overseeing of budget, operational arrangements and the use of the centres, agreeing and implementing a schedule of charges and discounts for directly managed centres and making asset management and investment proposals to ensure the portfolio is sustainable and meets local needs.

Minimum Service Expectations

Operation of a portfolio of community centres

Description of Function: Neighbourhood Wardens

The provision of a range of services, via uniformed patrols of Neighbourhood Wardens to reassure, reduce anti-social behaviour and fear of crime. Neighbourhood Wardens provide a local patrolling function, assistance in dealing with antisocial behaviour, co-ordination to maintain the physical appearance of areas and offer support to local residents with community safety issues in line with the achievement of Council Policy.

Minimum Service Expectations

To maximise the impact in terms of public reassurance of Neighbourhood Wardens through the management of their performance matrix of a wide range of duties.

To manage resources to ensure that the grant funding to the Council is maximised for neighbourhood watch deployment. This includes the achievement of specified outputs, outcomes and milestones in accordance with appropriate grant conditions.

Description of Function: Waste Management-Recycling Banks

The provision of providing banks and the management of contracts to ensure products are collected and recycled.

Minimum Service Expectations

To provide recycling banks at suitable locations throughout the city to enable the public to dispose of items such as lass plastic etc. All in accordance with the Integrated Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan.

Description of Function: Public Conveniences

The scheduled cleansing and maintenance of public conveniences

Minimum Service Expectations

Daily opening and closing of facilities.

Daily cleaning of facilities.

Maintenance of Facilities as required.

All in accordance with the Public Convenience Policy and Strategy

Description of Function: Youth services

The delivery of Youth Service area based programmes in respect of :-

- centre based youth work
- detached youth work
- Connexions project work with individuals and small groups

Minimum Service Expectations

To contribute to the achievement of an improvement in the council's overall 'reach' target for Youth Services in respect of young people aged 13-19.

-Ensure appropriate targeting of resources to achieve maximum coverage of

- The key local communities to be prioritised for youth work
- The particular social issues of the area to be tackled
- Curriculum priorities within the area

-Ensure services provided are in accordance with the Council's Youth Service policy, together with any national expectations or targets upon which the associated Youth Services are based.

The above minimum standards also relate services provide through 'contracting' arrangements with voluntary organisations in operation in some parts of the city.

Description of Function: Area Committee Revenue and Capital Well - Being Budgets**Minimum Service Expectations**

Decisions taken in relation to the utilisation of Well-Being budgets within the framework of the Council's Constitution and in accordance with Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. Specifically Area Committee will seek to:

1. enhance service delivery outcomes within their area
2. support the social, economic and environmental well being of their area (in accordance with approved Area Delivery Plans)

3. Summary of Elected Members Views About Area Management

This section highlights Member views about area management. Views have been summarised into two sections – positive comments and negative comments.

Positive Comments

1. A range of local projects have been initiated at local level.
2. Town and District regeneration schemes have been developed and are progressing.
3. Well Being schemes are making a difference.
4. Local partners are involved e.g. Police, Parish Councils.
5. Local environmental problems are being tackled.
6. Significant local regeneration projects have been initiated.
7. Some very good events are arranged.
8. Area focused contacts are in place.

Negative Comments

1. A greater understanding between council departments and Area Committees required.
2. There are tensions between Area Committees and District Partnerships. In some areas Elected Members are unclear whom their District partners are and what they are doing. There needs to be improved feedback from the District Partnerships to Area Committees.
3. Many Area Committee meetings have few members of the public in attendance.
4. There is limited attendance at some meetings by outside bodies.
5. There is minimal contact in some areas between senior Area Management staff and Area Committees.
6. Area management is an expensive overhead with too many managers.

7. Neighbourhood Management needs to develop plans and have the resources to ensure these plans are co-ordinated.
8. Concerns were expressed about staffing and vacancy issues.
9. There is a perception that service departments are reluctant to give control to Area Committees.
10. There has been a failure to give sufficient consideration to public conveniences and waste management.

4. Conclusions and Proposals

The ten Area Committees in Leeds and the area working arrangements which support them are making an impact on the services delivered at a local level and this is leading to welcomed improvements in communities and neighbourhoods across the City.

There appears to be strong cross party Elected Member support to enhance the roles and responsibilities of the Area Committees after three years under the current arrangements.

The proposals outlined below seek to build on existing strengths, address some current weaknesses and devolve more power to the Area Committees to enhance and increase their role.

It is believed that the implementation of these proposals will lead to better area working arrangements with extra responsibilities for the Area Committees which will enable them to make a bigger difference to the localities which they serve.

The proposals will support both prevailing Government and Council thinking and put an extra emphasis on improving service delivery and co-ordination at a local level. They will also support the requirement we have to consult and engage more effectively with the communities we serve. There is also an opportunity to work better with our partners at a more local level to really make a difference to neighbourhoods.

Whilst undertaking this review it was evident that considerable change was taking place both within the Council and within key partner agencies such as the PCT and the Police. This presents an opportunity to change the existing area based partnership arrangements through the District Partnerships and increase the emphasis on the Area Committees as the focal point for local partnership working in the City.

Clarity is required on what the existing and proposed delegated responsibilities mean in practice for the Area Committees. From discussions held it appears that three tiers may be appropriate as follows:

- budget responsibility – where the Area Committee has direct control over particular budgets e.g. the well being budgets
- influence responsibility – where the Area Committee influences a programme of work for a service or function e.g. the Youth Service
- monitoring responsibility – where the Area Committee monitors a service and holds it to account for delivery in its area e.g. the PCSO service provided by the Police

It should be noted that the requirements of each Area Committee may differ and it is therefore important that due consideration is given to these differences.

Proposals

Specific proposals from the review are grouped below into the following three broad areas:

- The roles of Elected Members and Area Committees
- Developing locality working
- Further delegated responsibilities for the Area Committees

Elected Members and Area Committees

Proposal 1: Newly elected members should be given a detailed briefing on the role of Area Committees and should acknowledge that they have seen and understand the delegated functions. Existing ward members should have an opportunity to receive an annual update on the role of the Committees and the delegated functions.

Proposal 2: Area Committee Chairs should be given an annual briefing, shortly after the commencement of the municipal year, to ensure they are clear on the role of the Area Committees and the latest information agreed by the Executive Board on the delegated functions.

Proposal 3: The role of ward members as ‘neighbourhood champions’ should be clarified in the Council’s constitution and expanded in line with thinking in the recent Local Government White Paper.

Proposal 4: Area Committees need to ensure they are undertaking effective consultation with the communities they serve. Arrangements for this, including evaluation of activity, should be clearly built into Area Delivery Plans and reviewed at least annually. The public should be made aware of Area Committee meetings and consultation activities taking place in their area.

Proposal 5: Whilst plans are important, the Area Committees need to ensure that services place more emphasis on achievements and progress in the localities served by the Committees.

Developing Locality Working

Proposal 6: Area Committees should play a bigger part in the City's Narrowing the Gap agenda with a focus on actions at the neighbourhood level.

Proposal 7: Area Committees should ensure that services are operating effectively in their areas to meet the needs of the localities being served. This should include ensuring that good working relationships are in place between Area Committees and local services and that local residents have a good awareness about services in their area.

Proposal 8: Intensive Neighbourhood Management work is beginning to have an impact in certain areas and opportunities to further extend neighbourhood based work should be examined.

Proposal 9: 'Tasking' arrangements with local partners such as the Police are proving effective and other opportunities to develop this tested methodology for local multi disciplinary work should be considered.

Proposal 10: Changes should be made to existing District Partnership arrangements in view of changes within the Council and within other agencies. By reducing District Partnerships to three there would be an increased role for Area Committees. Future arrangements should therefore increase the emphasis on Area Committees as the focal point for local partnership working in the City. This should include other public sector service delivery partners as well as local businesses and the local voluntary, community and faith sector.

Proposal 11: Area Committees should prioritise tackling micro or neighbourhood level problems utilising a range of data, intelligence and resources available to them. This would lead to results that are quicker and easier to measure. The outcomes from these should then be used to support the delivery of the outcomes in the Area Delivery Plans.

Delegated Responsibilities

Proposal 12: The delegated responsibilities of Area Committees should be extended. The following list of services represents the ones highlighted most by local Elected Members and Area Committee Chairs as being most suited to being delegated to a more local level:

- Management of local green spaces
- Grass cutting
- Delivery of joined up Children's Services

- Street cleansing
- Highway repairs
- Local facilities such as library buildings
- Environmental enforcement work such as appointed enforcement officers and graffiti removal teams.

Proposal 13: Clarity is required on what the existing and proposed delegated responsibilities mean in practice for the Area Committees. This may require new ways of working for Officers and Elected Members. In particular the Youth Services responsibility should be re-examined and opportunities taken to improve the profile of Youth Services across the City.

Proposal 14: Opportunities to better integrate the work of the recently appointed Locality Enablers in Children's Services with the work of the Area Committees should be explored.

Recommendations:

1. That this report is discussed with the Area Committee Chairs
2. That the proposals are considered by the Council's Executive Board in the Autumn along with an action plan to extend area working and the responsibilities of the Area Committees.
3. A report be presented to Area Committees to disseminate good practice established by other Area Committees.